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**WTO Loses Legitimacy as Affected Communities, CSO Shut Out of Normal Participation at MC13 in Abu Dhabi, Global Civil Society Condemns**

Abu Dhabi 28 February 2024: Non-governmental representatives participating in the third day of the MC13 of WTO in Abu Dhabi condemned the disruption of their normal activities in the name of security.

Three of the NGO representatives were detained for various allegations in the first two days. They were detained for one to two hours and then released. Among them was an Indian peasant leader handing a paper to a journalist he knew. He was immediately arrested for allegedly distributing leaflets inside the convention centre, a detainable offence. Two other non-government delegates from Norway and the United States were arrested for taking pictures inside the convention centre. The security also stopped leaflet distribution, confiscated placards, and stopped them from taking photos of their own actions.

"This is my 11th MC and I've never seen anything like this level of repression. The WTO Secretariat has insisted that it is working towards clarifying things with the host country. But we see no evidence that the DG – who is widely known as a person who, shall we say, can get her way when she wants – is insisting on our rights being restored.” said Deborah James, facilitator of the global Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS) network of CSOs.

The WTO Director General, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has billed this Ministerial as the most “open, transparent and inclusive process” to date. Yet her institution is failing to ensure participants that the guiding information communicated by the WTO, and the prevailing practice with regards to what civil society can do, actually holds for MC13, Ms James added.

"Participants, especially from developing countries, are fearful of even walking alone in the conference centre now, lest they be unjustly detained and possibly deported, and then unable to secure visas ever again. This climate of fear should not be the result of advocacy in an institution of global economic governance," said Rahmat Maulana Sidik, Executive Director of Indonesia for Global Justice.

"It was a long way to Abu Dhabi from my country. I came here to get work done, and I do not feel safe to do the normal activities that I always do in Ministerial Conferences. The uncertainty of not knowing if I will be detained just for giving away my research is paralyzing me from doing what I am supposed to do,” said Sofia Scasserra, researcher from Argentina with the Transnational Institute.

EquityBD Policy Research Coordinator Barkat Ullah Maruf said that the participation of NGO representatives is very important. Because they help government representatives to make public-oriented decisions with various information and analyses. But such obstruction is reprehensible.

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